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# THE OLD TESTAMENT AND THE PROBLEM OF SUFFERING

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*We do not mean to publish in the BIBLICAL WORLD articles of any considerable length. But we make exceptions in this number, among them this striking article by Professor Humbert. The treatment is so sweeping and so penetrating that it carries a message to our present world as it passes through its own valley of the shadow of death. It thus takes its place in that field of vital religious thinking into which a proper study of the Bible always leads.*

Many remember doubtless the beautiful cry that Aeschylus places in the mouth of Atossa: "Friends! the experience of unhappiness teaches us that when man is assailed by the wave of misfortune, everything inspires him with fear; but if ever fortune is favorable, he thinks that the wind of prosperity will blow forever! Today everything terrifies me, everything presents before my eyes adverse deities!"<sup>1</sup> Thus speaks Atossa and thus we feel also. Today everything terrifies us, our eyes are fixed on the dark realities of life, and the suffering of humanity forces itself on us more painfully than ever.

What place does the Old Testament give to the problem of suffering? and what answer did Israel give to the tragic questions: What is the reason of suffering? Why does God let us suffer?

Our study is quite naturally divided under two heads: the problem before Ezekiel and after Ezekiel, for the thought of that prophet marks, as we shall see, an important and decisive turning-point in Israel's way of looking on the subject we are considering. Let us notice at the

outset that the solution Israel gives to this problem is intimately related to the solution given to other problems: relation to the progress of monotheism and moralism, relation to a solidaristic or individualistic conception of life, relation to the idea of life beyond, and finally to that high school of adversity on whose discipline Israel was so long trained.

We must not of course expect to find any systematic solutions of this problem of suffering. Few nations besides the Israelites have been as ignorant of logical thinking and systematic syntheses, being satisfied with individual views. We do not find any philosophical deductions or universal solutions, but assertions expressed separately.

The Old Testament does not afford us any systematic views of the initial stages of Israel's religion; there are only some more or less clear, rapid glances and involuntary allusions. In those far-away times it is animism that prevails; man is at the mercy of innumerable spirits always ready to hurt him, or at least to play tricks on him. From them come the evils of man. The Old Testament

<sup>1</sup> *Pers.* 598 ff.

has kept us a well-known though rather dull echo of this mentality: it is the scene of Peniel (Gen., chap. 32). Is it the wrestling of a man in prayer? No, for it is not in that kind of struggle that one strains one's hip; but, according to the Jahvistic transposition, it seems to be the story, full of primitive flavor, of a spirit, of a demon—probably the numen of the torrent Jabboq—which attacks the venturesome man who tries to pass over the ford. But the sun rises, and like all those of his kind, the spirit disappears.

This seems the evidence of a time when jealous, cruel spirits spied on man, ready to inflict on him all sorts of evils; the evidence of a time when the Israelite connected the human suffering with the inauspicious actions of the spirits and demons and with their jealousy.

So there are sufferings due to the enviousness of the spirits; this seems to have been the most ancient opinion that one meets with in the Old Testament. Thus demons command illnesses and regulate accidents, as in the Assyro-Babylonian religion. But later on, with the progressing evolution of Jahweh's worship, this last-named pushed his rivals back into the shade, but he himself kept some of their atrocious features. This Jahweh, in sudden fits of jealousy and savage moods of caprice, inflicted the most cruel evils on man. Thus one evening, as Moses, tired by his journey, is going home to rest for the night, Jahweh suddenly assails him and tries to deal him a deadly blow (Exod. 4: 24-26). He will have as peace offering the blood of circumcision, and Zipporah must, by an odd rite, calm the incensed divinity. It was to the blows of that still barbarous and whimsical Jahweh that one con-

sidered one's self exposed, for he was ready to make men endure the worst sufferings if they did not quench his thirst for blood. A mere ritual mistake, one moment of forgetfulness, and the divinity burst on you with a whole train of evils! At those remote origins suffering came accordingly from the spirits and gods; its causes could not be foreseen; the caprice of the god had a big part in it: in short, mere suffering without any other object than vengeance and the desire to harm or to play a bloody trick on man.

However, from the oldest sources of the Pentateuch a more systematic answer comes also down to us, though isolated and without much echo in the rest of the Old Testament. It is to be found in the Jahvistic account of Gen., chap. 3. The first human couple is in Paradise and has by its sin lost its sexual innocence. What is the object of this narrative? Does it relate the origin of sin? No, not so much that as, before all, the origin of suffering. The base crawling of the serpent, the travail of childbirth for the woman, the afflictions of the man, their hard labor, whence does all that come? From a divine curse which condemns man to bear forever his lot of misery. But we find, moreover, in this passage (Gen. 3: 16-19) some traces of the ancient magic conceptions, for the malediction works magically. This account of Gen., chap. 3, is an interesting attempt at explaining the general character of human suffering in time and in space, and at explaining it by a unique principle. Mankind is cursed because of a transgression which made it pass from the Golden Age to the Age of Brass. It is an attempt at going back to the very

first beginnings of the race, a bold assertion of the solidarity of the whole race.

Shall we speak here of heredity? The modern conception of this term is evidently unknown to the thinker of old; he no doubt believes in a curse acting always anew, and does not think of its particular mode of transmission. As to the "Fall," it is not in itself the aim of this account, but only an episode in the primordial drama, and the author's object is to find out the very origin and reason of suffering.

Now this account is interesting even in other respects. Death is for us part and parcel of the problem of suffering; nay, is its most cruel and distressing enigma. Nothing of that kind was true in ancient Israel, but an absolute fatalism and the unanimous conviction that there is nothing strange in death, that man being dust must return to dust (Gen. 3:19: "for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return"). Death is a natural phenomenon which cannot be taken notice of without sadness, but provokes neither complaint, nor protest, nor dread. Death is in no wise either mysterious or disturbing. Such a state of mind we can hardly conceive, but we must at least recognize its existence.

That story of Gen., chap. 3, brings us into close contact with a characteristic feature of ancient Israel's mentality, one which occupies a most prominent place in the question of suffering: the solidarity of the successive generations. In those remote centuries the individual was merged in the community, absorbed in the clan; the members of the same tribe were all jointly accountable, and the old vendetta struck as often as it could the

murderer and all those of the same blood. In the realm of suffering we find the same blotting out of the individual: the members of the same family are all at one in suffering; all take part in the suffering of a near relation; God is "visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, upon the third and upon the fourth generations" (Exod. 20:5; 24:7; Deut. 5:9). Some sufferings fall therefore to our lot just because we are partly accountable for the faults of our ancestors and consequently have a part in their punishment. This should not be taken in the modern sense of biological heredity; it is God himself who extends over several generations and over a whole community the punishment deserved by one sole individual. An opinion of that kind takes us back to a time when the individual was still hardly conscious of his own dignity. We have here undoubtedly an attempt at giving an explanation to the problem of suffering: there are evils which we are not responsible for, and which fall on us only because we are the descendants of a guilty man. But it should be noticed that this explanation, though partly true, could only satisfy such souls as were not yet autonomous nor conscious of the individual man's rights. It remained, however, the answer in vogue in Israel for a long while, even down to the prophets. As to the aim of that collective suffering, it actually seems to have been only punishment for punishment's sake, without any pedagogical idea at the back of it. The guilty must suffer in that larger self represented by his descendants. Needless to quote any examples; there are a number of them in the historical books of the Old Testament.

However, step by step, a revolution took place, beginning with the first prophets. Individualism came slowly to light; the prophets gradually called for a more personal faith than in the past years. To this should be added that they had also displaced the axis of religion; instead of working by rites, it worked henceforth by ethics. This is what happened in a marked way from Amos onward, and what Moses had perhaps more or less clearly foreseen. The divine being, from being capricious and amoral, becomes moral and just. Also, ancient polytheism and polydemonism are progressively replaced by the Jahvistic monolatry, and later on by monotheism. In the presence of this single and moral God the individual personality comes forth from its century-long effacement, and entirely new relations are established between the divinity and its worshipers—personal and essentially moral relations. Moreover, we witness at the same time the dawn of universal monotheism. Jahweh is no more the master of a small district of the earth; he is promoted sovereign of the world and of the whole universe (for reasons which we cannot examine here—partly moral, first, and partly drawn, without doubt, from the spectacle of the great oriental monarchies). A just and moral God thus becomes the master of all; the divinity being individualized and moralized, his worshipers also become moralized and individualized. The result of all this will be, by degrees, a totally new attitude toward the problem of suffering.

So it is that, under the impulse of the prophets, the conception of divine justice is forced upon the Israelite's mind, and these two factors are henceforward

facing each other: divine justice and suffering. In other words, it is the problem of theodicy which is forced upon the Hebrew mind, however little given it may be to rational thinking; the suffering of mankind must be put in harmony with divine justice. Previously considered from an individual and no more from a general point of view, suffering must henceforth be looked on in the light of justice. And then, since on the other hand Hosea laid special stress on divine love, how are we to reconcile our miseries with this feature of the Godhead?

We accordingly see the prophets turning around the problem of suffering; it is they who actually stated it; it is they who brought it before the Israelitic thought. Indeed the question of divine retribution assumes a paramount importance with the prophets. Instead of a national, collective, and unconditional election Amos lays down the thesis of a conditional election; the ethical values now come to the foreground in the divine calculations. The sufferings of the nation are the inevitable result of the reaction of the moral God against the unworthy behavior of his worshipers: "You only have I known of all the families of the earth: therefore I will visit upon you all your iniquities" (Amos 3:2). Only, although in the earlier prophets the calls are of an individual stamp, solidarism still has the upper hand in applying the theory of retribution. The retribution is a righteous punishment, but the righteous are included in it together with the unrighteous; all succumb in the great national retribution, as the destiny of each individual remains linked with that of his people. The individual, however

upright he may be, suffers for the crimes of the guilty nation. And let nobody object that the earlier prophets made use of the term "remnant"; they did not mean by using that word to satisfy the demands of the individual retribution and secure to the righteous the propitious career that they deserve. The doctrine of the remnant contains an especially strong menace; it is a figure of speech meant to bring home to the sinners' minds the extent of the divine punishment and national catastrophe.

This thesis of the just retribution of the nation's sins by a moral God, this essentially prophetic theory found its classical expression in the Deuteronomist's philosophy of history. I need take no other example than the deuteronomic frame of the Book of Judges and the preface which is at the same time the outline of the whole book (Judg. 2:6—3:6). The prophet's thesis is here most rigorously put into practice and uttered in an almost dogmatic tone. The nation's history is subject to a fatal rhythm: the Israelites having bowed down to foreign Gods, Jahweh punishes them in abandoning them to their enemies; they repent; a judge rises and delivers them; then, after an interval of quiet, idolatry starts anew, and that rhythm in four beats continues. Such is the doctrine which, widely spread, was meant to explain the numerous turns of fortune in the national history and, at the same time, the collective suffering. In this kind of deuteronomic philosophy, all evils come from Jahweh, an idea contrary to the old popular religion, in which other godheads acted toward the same end. This one fact should be duly noticed: those sufferings are due, ac-

cording to the Deuteronomists, most of all to moral motives, but also to ritual motives: for instance, to sacrifices made in some other place than Jerusalem or to some mistake in the offering of a sacrifice. Later on, and especially in the legislation of the Priestly Code, punishment and sufferings are provoked mainly by ritual and not by moral faults.

A big step forward was soon to be made by Ezekiel. Indeed it was he who secured to the individual element its proper place in the problem of suffering (and in the problem of evil). Till then suffering had hardly been considered otherwise than under its collective aspect, a mode of thought which necessarily calls forth several new considerations: Is it worthy of the just God of the prophets to punish the righteous and make them suffer as well as the evil-doers? This is nothing else than individualism asserting itself more and more, and consequently the doctrine of divine retribution is going to be interpreted in new ways. That difficulty seems to have been taken notice of even before Ezekiel, for there is in the Jahvist a passage of probably later inspiration in which the problem is already brought up: it is the account of Abraham's intercession for the righteous of Sodom (Gen. 18:17 ff.): "That be far from thee to do after this manner, to slay the righteous with the wicked, that so the righteous should be as the wicked; that be far from thee!" Abraham declares to God, and the solution given in this passage is that a sufficient minority of righteous can obtain the salvation of the wicked. But in Ezekiel the objection is even more clearly expressed and the difficulty is resolutely solved in a really original way,

under the pressure of the prevailing circumstances: the men of the exile were evidently astonished at God's treating the innocent in the same way as the guilty and inflicting on the children's generation sufferings that were actually deserved by the foregoing generation. Ezekiel was heir to his predecessor's efforts and pushed his logic even farther than they: God is just, therefore he treats the individuals—not only the community—according to the rules of strictest justice. Alluding to the proverb then current, "The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge" (Ezek. 18:2)—a proverb which illustrates the idea that the children undergo the consequences of their fathers' sins—Ezekiel declares without the slightest circumlocution: "The soul that sinneth, it shall die" (Ezek., chap. 18; cf. 18:17–20). And he expounds with pitiless logic the theory of the specifically individual retribution: the son never suffers owing to his father's faults, nor the latter owing to his son's, but every man's suffering comes from his own individual sins. And in another place, in the fourteenth chapter, Ezekiel sets up against attempting any solution like that of Gen., chap. 18: three proverbially righteous men, Noah, Daniel, and Job, could not save a guilty people; they alone would be spared on account of their own righteousness. This solution pretends to justify the demands made by divine justice and divine love; for God takes no delight in the death of the wicked, but had "rather that he should return from his way, and live" (Ezek. 18:23). That theory of Ezekiel's reflects credit on his moral conviction if not on his clear insight. He must indeed

have been a character of quite exceptional stamp who dared launch forth such an assertion into the world and give a solution both so simple and so clear to the problem of suffering. Suffering comes from sin, and strictly personal sin, as a just punishment. Such is the logical conclusion of the premises which were given by the first prophets when they became the heralds of divine justice and called every individual to a clearer consciousness of his worth as well as to more personal relations with the divinity. Ezekiel's theory is a splendid challenge thrown to the old Jewish reasonableness, which perceived quite well that there are certain sufferings for which we can be only indirectly responsible, out of solidarity with the preceding generations and with our contemporary fellow-men; but this theory is also a vigorous effort to give its fullest force to the gravity of sin and to lift up the individual responsibility.

Strange to say, that explanation, however contrary to sound common sense and actual experience, had the greatest success, and the doctrine of strict individual retribution became the leading dogma of Judaism from the exile on. In what was henceforth formally established as Jewish orthodoxy, suffering came to be systematically connected with sin, individual and personal sin. That solution of Ezekiel was fitted to every case with automatic regularity and became the one and only way of accounting for all human suffering. That is the official and prevalent point of view adopted in almost all the post-exilic literature. It is clearly marked in a great many passages of the Book of Proverbs and in a great number of Psalms; it is explicitly stated by Job's

friends and is to be found everywhere in the Chronicles, though in the latter book with this additional shade that suffering is often caused by mere cultural mistakes.

In this respect it is most instructive to compare the Chronicles with the Book of Kings. So great is the prestige of the theory which connects suffering with sin that in order to justify the misfortune of a righteous man told of in the Book of Kings the Chronicler feels bound to recall some failure of this righteous man (II Chron. 25:14-24). In the Proverbs the author sometimes goes even so far as to say that there is an intimate relation between the nature of the punishment and the suffering on one hand, and the kind of sin indulged on the other: "Whoso diggeth a pit shall fall therein; and he that rolleth a stone, it shall return upon him" (Prov. 24:27). Piety and prosperity go hand in hand, good and bad fortune depend directly on our own conduct. "Remember, I pray thee, who ever perished being innocent? Or where were the upright cut off? According as I have seen, they that plow iniquity and sow trouble, reap the same" (Job 4:7, 8). So deep-rooted was this doctrine that even in the time of the Gospels Jesus had to contradict those who declared that the victims of the tower of Siloam had brought on themselves such a terrible death by some exceptional crimes (Luke 13:2). Again, in the Fourth Gospel the disciples ask if the affliction of the man born blind is due to the sins of his parents or to his own failings (John 9:2).

In real life this explanation of suffering was obviously confronted by all sorts of impossibilities, for even the most superficial man cannot help noticing that

many kinds of suffering do not come from our sins, and especially that many righteous men are unhappy and many wicked prosperous. Ezekiel's theory was thus to bring soon to the fore the problem of the suffering of the righteous. And the solutions given to that problem introduce a little variety into the almost uniform monotony of the dogma of retribution in the Jewish times. But this point should be insisted on: from Ezekiel on, the universally recognized and only orthodox doctrine is that all suffering is due to personal sins and that all sin unfailingly brings on suffering for the sinner. Such is the background against which, ever since the sixth century, a few more or less original and varied solutions stand out in strong relief.

Brought face to face with this novel aspect of the problem of suffering (i.e., the suffering of the righteous), many saw no other issue than blind faith in the orthodox dogmatics, and were then forced up against the desperate casuistry of all orthodoxy. The author of Ps. 37 is a typical representative of this category of people. He blocks up all paths of access to evidence and simply denies that the problem should exist at all: "For yet a little while, and the wicked shall not be: Yea, thou shalt diligently consider his place, and he shall not be. But the meek shall inherit the land, and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace" (Ps. 37:10, 11). And farther down, calling back to mind his past experience, the Psalmist declares: "Yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging the bread" (Ps. 31:25). The sufferings of the righteous are but for a day, like thistledown before the wind, and as to the wicked who prosper,



their hour will soon come and their good fortune will disappear. In other words, we must know how to wait a little while and not judge from the passing appearance. Have patience and you shall see that life conforms sooner or later to the dogma.

The illusions of orthodoxy had so strongly settled in the minds of the people that they were mistaken for truth itself. This is what stands out too in the First Psalm, which is much like a preface to the whole collection and sings the blessedness of the righteous man, comparing him with a tree planted beside running waters, as against the misfortunes of the wicked man, who is like chaff that the wind driveth away. Suffice it to mention these few examples, for numbers of them are to be met in every page of the post-exilic literature. Let us remark, however, that certain minds came perforce to acknowledge the fact that the righteous do suffer (such was the case of the author of Ps. 57, for instance), but that they hurriedly postponed the practical solution of the distressing enigma of the sufferings of the righteous until the great eschatological crisis (notice, e.g., the burden of this psalm, vss. 6 and 12). The dogma of retribution was thus satisfied. As to the reason of those sufferings, it lay doubtless in their pedagogical value and in their importance as tests of man's faithfulness.

A few independent minds nevertheless did not fall into line with the official doctrine of Judaism as to the problem of suffering; they are few in number anyway. The spectacle of reality impressed them too deeply to allow them

to be satisfied with the makeshifts of contemporary apologetics. Free of spirit and frank of conscience, they stir us with the earnestness of purpose which drove them to strike their own solitary paths and raise their voices against the universally accepted theology of the Jewish church.

It seems to me that the first anticipations of the breakdown of orthodoxy are to be found in the popular story of Job, i.e., the prose frame of the poem of Job (chaps. 1, 2, 42:7-17), which seems to be of an earlier date than the poem itself.<sup>1</sup> As a whole, this story follows the doctrine of retribution. Job, whose sufferings are but for a time, is duly repaid for his piety and owns at the end of his life "more blessings" than he ever had at the beginning of his career: 14,000 sheep, 6,000 camels, 1,000 pair of oxen, 1,000 she-asses, 7 sons, and 3 daughters; besides, he lived 140 years, lived among his own descendants until the fourth generation, and "died, being old and full of days." All that is orthodoxy itself and the exact application of the dogma of retribution. However, the cause itself of Job's sufferings is not at all orthodox in this popular account, for there is no sin. Job suffers because, on Satan's suggestion, God says that he shall prove to his court of divine beings, beyond the possibility of doubt, the disinterestedness and consequently the genuineness of his servant's piety.

We have here the implied acknowledgment that some sufferings are not due to sin; then an attempt is made at justifying God with the explanation just described. It seems to me that we find here the following idea: many happen-

<sup>1</sup> G. Duhm, *Commentar*, *ad loc.*

ings which seem mysterious to us would come out perfectly clear if we could see their working from a better vantage-ground. There may be in the celestial court, in the mind of such and such an angel or heavenly spirit, some doubts concerning the righteousness of one or another good man, and our sufferings are accordingly inflicted on us only to drive those misgivings away. This same conception of the trying of our piety by pain is also found in Ps. 66:9-12: "For thou, O God, hast proved us; thou hast tried us, as silver is tried. We went through fire and through water; but thou broughtest us out into a wealthy place." The only difference is that we have here no more, as in the popular story of Job, the obscure idea that all our troubles cannot be accounted for by purely human conceptions of human reason, and that the explanation is sometimes far beyond the world of human and earthly things.

There had already been before Ezekiel an echo of the anxiety caused by the problem of the righteous man's sufferings. Even before the future doctrine had been stated in all its precision and universality by Ezekiel, Jeremiah had already experienced in his own person the agonizing problem of the suffering of the innocent. In a passage of the most vivid and moving sincerity<sup>1</sup> Jeremiah gives free vent to his deep distress: "Righteous art thou, O Lord, when I plead with thee; yet would I reason the cause with thee: wherefore does the way of the wicked prosper? Wherefore are they all at ease that deal very treacherously?" and after this complaint the prophet, in his martyrdom, cries out to the Heavens

this bloodthirsty call: "Pull them out like sheep for the slaughter, and prepare them for the day of slaughter." Here is a piece of fanaticism which betrays all the sharpness of the problem; Jeremiah saw the only possible solution in a sudden and miraculous intervention of God, and his passionate prayer shows the depth of his moral anguish. This most instructive acknowledgment of the conflict between life-experience and theory is met again in that admirable psalm in which, notwithstanding the mystic fervor in which the Psalmist is lost while face to face with the All-presence and Omniscience, he cannot help crying out in fierce hatred against the wicked who are still alive in spite of their iniquity (Ps. 139:21-22).

But those utterances are hardly anything else than the evidence of negative resistance offered against the prevalent solution; more positive answers were not slow in coming to the light. The life of Jeremiah already contains an implicit one. Indeed, what is it that upholds him every time in his moments of discouragement? The certainty that he is innocent and is suffering because of his prophetic call and for his people. We find here in germ the idea of a suffering which is not the punishment of sin, but which one takes upon one's self for others' sake.

But the hymns of Jahweh's servant, which are found in Deutero-Isaiah, give us the classical expression of this solution. Jahweh's servant, the Ebed-Jahweh, is the everlasting type of the suffering righteous. Whether he is an individual or the personification of Israel as a people, that makes no difference

<sup>1</sup> Jer. 12:1-6.

here; his suffering is none the less a substitutive suffering, a sacrifice, in the deepest meaning of this word, the death of an innocent instead of the guilty and for the guilty. The sufferings of the servant of Jahweh have the redemption of the world for their *raison d'être* (the redemption of the Jewish or the gentile world); his sufferings belong to his divine mission. He himself, the truly righteous and innocent, willingly accepts the sufferings which the wicked deserved to endure because of their sins; he takes on himself the sins of others; he becomes of his own accord answerable together with them and assumes the punishment which should have visited them:

Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him, and with his stripes we are healed. . . . the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all. . . . He poured out his soul unto death, and he was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.<sup>1</sup>

So here the suffering of the righteous has the true character of an atonement. The moral relation between the suffering of the righteous and the sins of the guilty is quite an original and a fruitful element; never perhaps did the Jewish thought more accurately fathom the mysteries of the sacrifice which the apostle Paul, with his usual vehemence and at the same time the greatest depth of thought, bluntly calls "folly." Here suffering and death are no more a hope-

less puzzle or the mere matter to a syllogism both narrow and strict; they are on the contrary the highest and grandest reality of human life, the spontaneous, voluntary, and fruitful sacrifice, the religious act *par excellence*, viz., the divine becoming human.

It has been said, we think rightly, that the author of the hymns of Jahweh's servant was not only influenced by the writings of Jeremiah, but that the life of the great prophet also impressed him deeply, the life of that righteous man who loved his people with the utmost unselfishness and actually gave his sufferings and his life for the salvation of the guilty.<sup>2</sup>

However this may be, this particular problem of the righteous man's suffering receives in those hymns a solution as deep as it is original. On the other hand, the general question of suffering is left untouched, doubtless because it was too theoretic, too philosophical, for the time; only later will the Jewish thought dare to tackle it.

Indeed, the first to consider the problem of suffering from a universal as well as from an individual point of view was the wonderful author of the poem of Job, who probably lived after the exile. It may well be said that the whole poem revolves around this torturing question: Why does the righteous man suffer, and why does suffering in general exist at all? Considering the size and the importance of this book, it seems worth while to examine it with the closest attention. In fact, in all the Jewish literature it is the only work in which the problem in hand is considered in its fullest meaning.

<sup>1</sup> J. P. Peters, *The Religion of the Hebrews* (1914), p. 323.

<sup>2</sup> Isa., chap. 53, *passim*.

The hero, who largely voices the poet's own ideas, is Job, a choice soul among the choicest, a profoundly religious heart, a sincere conscience; in short, a righteous man. Now it happens that this man is stricken with a most filthy disease, leprosy. What a tragic contrast between his easy life and his unhappy condition! The hero cannot restrain his distress, and in a torrent of bitter clamors he expresses this one and only idea: Would that I were dead! A terrible "why?" sounds through the whole poem. Job stands here face to face with the very problem of suffering and of theodicy: Why do I, who am righteous, receive nothing but grief and pain at the hands of God? And, in a more general way, why do the wicked so often have a blissful life, while the righteous are doomed to the worst misfortune? Job protests with all his energy and his most cutting irony against the orthodox dogma of retribution impersonated by his three friends. It is with admirable art that the poet has known how to contrast those two attitudes: on one hand the admonitions of dogma, on the other the man who lives and suffers and whose thought wholly proceeds from real life. Job has nothing but sarcasm for the doctrine of retribution, which ignores life. In answering the apologists' empty phrases and foolish theories, Job simply produces as a set-off bare reality painted in the harshest colors:

For ye say, where is the house of the prince? And where is the tent wherein the wicked dwelt? And where is the way? Have ye not asked them that go by the way? And do ye not know their tokens? That the

evil man is reserved to the day of calamity? That they are led forth to the day of wrath? Who shall declare his way to his face? And who shall repay him what he hath done? Yet shall he be borne to the grave, and shall keep watch over the tomb. The clods of the valley shall be sweet unto him.<sup>1</sup>

When Job, turning his eyes away from human beings, goes down to the depths of his inner soul, what fiery professions of innocence surge up to his lips! He will not be made amenable to the orthodox syllogism, "If man is righteous, he is happy; therefore if man is not happy, he must inevitably be unrighteous." He upholds the rights of his conscience with genuine passion and proclaims with resolute assurance the supremacy of conscience over dogma. Job is no doubt aware that, like all men, he is a sinner in a general way, but he denies the fact that sin is a sufficient reason for all his evils; he sees no proportion whatever between his present misery and his past conduct: "If I have sinned, what do I unto thee, O thou watcher of men? Why dost thou not pardon my transgression and take away my iniquity?" (Job 7:20-21.) And here is one out of a hundred other manly cries of that manly heart: "Till I die, I will not put away mine integrity from me. My righteousness I hold fast, and will not let it go: my heart shall not reproach me so long as I live" (27:5, 6).

As a contrast with the calmness of the three friends and their simple-minded apologetics, the poet shows us in Job the real man, alive and suffering, who searches in great distress for an answer to the puzzle of suffering, allows himself to be deceived by no theory, and dares to

<sup>1</sup> Job 21:28 ff.

open his eyes on the unveiled reality. The others, his friends, are the theologians, the easy-going, weak apologists of divine justice; but he, Job, in spite of his doubts and blasphemies, believes in God with far stronger faith and defends him in a way far worthier of his majesty. He openly charges God with injustice, but in so doing he gets a far more vivid experience of the divine world than his gainsayers. With him we have the end of a dead orthodoxy and the birth of a new theology. While the author of Ps. 139 makes us almost dizzy with his enthusiastic description of the holy Omnipresence, Job sighs for God without finding him: "Behold, I go forward, but he is not there; and backward, but I cannot perceive him" (23:8). Indeed, how could Job forbear to charge God with injustice since for him the solution of the problem of the righteous in distress could not be postponed till the Great Beyond? For after death there is Sheol: "Before I go whence I shall not return, even to the land of darkness and of the shadow of death; a land of thick darkness, as darkness itself; a land of the shadow of death, without any order, and where the light is darkness" (10:21, 22).

On one side are the theologians, who have found God but have in reality lost him again, and on the other stands Job, who has lost his God but who seeks him unceasingly and does possess him just because of his indefatigable searching. Over and beyond all his hardships he strives toward God; his friends of course see the reason of his suffering in man, and he sees it in God. And his God is not the God of strict justice, but he does what Mohammed many centuries later will advise the believers to do: he tries

to find in God a refuge against God himself (Sur. 9:119).

And little by little a change comes stealing over Job's soul; he slowly turns toward God, toward a God who might be standing by his side, even though he did not always understand him. He does not turn to God so much to implore help as to come to his rights near him. He has at first a few short outcries of hope. Such are the deeply pathetic lines in which Job tells God that he will be some day sorry for his cruel silence, but that it will be too late then, for Job will already have broken down (7:8; cf. 9:35). When God does not even grant him time to swallow, he prays: "Only do not two things unto me, then will I not hide myself from thy face: withdraw thine hand far from me, and let not thy terror make me afraid; then call thou and I will answer; or let me speak, and answer thou to me" (13:20-22).

In another place Job asks God to allow him, after his death at least, an hour's interview in which he may prove his righteousness, and God acknowledges his servant's rights (14:13 ff.). He feels, in spite of all, that God is the supreme warrantor of his rights (16:18-21). And finally, in the obscure passage of chapter 19, with a splendid beat of the wing, Job rises up to the idea of a life after death, temporary though it be. In that well-known passage Job mentions neither resurrection nor eternal life; but he is so sure that his conscience is in the right that he rises to the pitch of hoping for a divine testimony of his righteousness, even after death. Duhm has put it with unusual depth: "The two factors working here were on one hand the need of the moral personality to uphold its own

rights against the oppression of an unfair fatality, and on the other the need of the religious personality to see God and enjoy His love."<sup>1</sup>

Job had come to doubt the love, the wisdom, and the justice of God; the whole world seemed to him a world of disorder, of injustice, of moral chaos. As a matter of fact, the poet offers us no satisfactory answer to the "why?" of the righteous man's suffering; he succeeds neither in explaining nor in understanding the wherefore of his evils; he is only able to cling to God through thick and thin. Strengthened by his good conscience, he unflinchingly shouts out his innocence and fights himself through to the hope (at least the temporary hope) that God is, in spite of contrary appearances, the ally of that good conscience and the vindicator of its innocence. The dreadful puzzle is not solved; it is even more embarrassing than ever before, since, although God is standing by the suffering man's side, his condition is none the less unfortunate. This same God who destroys his bodily being will be the staunch abetter of his moral personality. Such an attitude at once calls to mind those few lines in Flaubert's *Letters* (I, 196): "Happiness is a lie, the searching for which causes all the calamities of life. But there are moments of serene peace which look very much like happiness, and are perhaps better."

Thus the poet does not set one theory against another; *theoretically* he gives up solving the tragical enigma, but *practically* he has found an issue: he believes with all the faith and strength of his moral self that God, over and above all

appearances, is the defender of his righteousness. God's divine attributes are safe, but suffering remains unaccounted for. Nowhere else in the Old Testament do we find a soul more painfully writhing in its dire struggle against the problems of life; we have here nothing of a cool-headed and systematic study on the problem of suffering; we are watching the human soul itself as it is looking for God.

However, suffering remains unexplained; the poet even goes one step farther and says that it cannot be explained. The problem which is here assuming its general character seems so strewn with difficulties to the old thinker that he brings in God himself to help those that seek (chaps. 38-41). This God whom Job is sighing for, this God whom he longs to see in order that they may converse, as it were, man to man, this God suddenly appears to Job; but instead of coming for a quiet interview, as Job dreamed it, God manifests his presence in a storm. That alone is already meant to show men how far God is above us and how miserably small we are when it comes to a discussion with him.

It can be said that Jahweh well-nigh crushes Job under the multitude of questions he asks him point-blank: "Gird up now thy loins like a man, for I will demand of thee, and declare thou unto me" (Job 38:3). God carries Job from one end of the world to the other, he unrolls before his eyes the whole of nature, he overwhelms him with the unfathomable mysteries (unfathomable to the man of those times) that break out on all sides in the universe of God's

<sup>1</sup> Duhm, *op. cit.*, p. 104.

creation—a feverish headlong flight through and around the limitless expanse of the heavens and the earth! Can Job understand and explain the wonders of the universe? Can he give an account of the laws that rule the lives of living creatures? Can he grasp as much as one particle of the order of the cosmos?

When at last Job is as good as stunned by the complexity of all those things, and fairly breaks down under the weight of the unutterable mystery which encompasses the universe, God hurls forth at his face that supreme piece of irony: "Shall he that cavilleth contend with the Almighty? He that argues with God, let him answer it." Then Job answered the Lord and said: "Behold, I am of small account; what shall I answer thee? I lay mine hand upon my mouth. Once have I spoken and I will not answer; yea, twice, but I will proceed no further" (40:2-6). And after a second long rebuke of God, Job bows down again; the terrible divine apostrophe has shattered to bits whatever continuous line of thought he may have had before: "I know that thou canst do all things, and that no purpose of thine can be restrained. Who is this that hideth counsel without knowledge? Therefore have I uttered that which I understood not, things too wonderful for me, which I knew not. Wherefore I abhor myself and repent in dust and ashes" (42:2-6).

The concluding addresses of Jahweh are meant to make Job understand that man is by no means the center of the world which overlaps him on all sides. The world is greater than man, and the latter is neither the measure of all things nor the sole object of divine Providence.

The unfathomable harmony of the universe carries the poet far beyond the human microcosm. What proportion can there be between man and the universe? What a fool man makes of himself by daring to pass judgment on the Master of this inscrutable universe! God does not act after the way of our minds. He acts according to his boundless might, and his actions consequently assume the same baffling character. God is above our puny criticism, above all our theodicies.<sup>1</sup> The bodily happiness of man is not an aim in itself for the Creator, and the plans of divine Justice are far above our yearnings for material well-being. Let then man have full trust in this just God who is the surest warrant of man's most invaluable possession—his conscience. Besides, let man submissively accept to be nothing but a mere atom in the ever-moving stream of cosmical life. At the end the poet comes to deny implicitly all sort of relation between our bodily fate and our moral behavior. But here is something more: if one reads between the lines one feels that God is actively at work in the universe. His breath enlivens and permeates it, his intelligence, his will, his might, rule its destinies. He is a God of life and a mighty God. Is it doing violence to the poet's idea to admit that according to his thought this life-giving breath must warm up poor and pitiful mankind?

Lastly, this God's wisdom is so far above our intelligence that man ought never to question his actions. It is a mysterious and troubling wisdom, an unlimited strength; let man then bow down. As Hamlet says,

<sup>1</sup> Köberle, *Sünde und Gnade im religiösen Leben des Volkes Israel* (1905), p. 384.

There are more things in heaven and earth,  
 Horatio,  
 Than are dreamt of in your philosophy.

Is that a really satisfactory theoretical solution? No, for in truth it is nothing but an acknowledgment of powerlessness and a more sentimental than rational one at that. But practically the poet has found an issue: man, were he even of a Titan brood, like Job, must bow down and hush before the incomprehensible God whose true essence by far surpasses our human formulas; he must deliver himself entirely into the hands of this living and dreadful God. In contemplating nature man enters into a state of deep humility and becomes aware of his altogether relative importance. The conclusion to be drawn from all that is submissiveness as far as our bodily happiness is concerned; this resignation of self is, however, tempered by a slight breath of hope: though the world be greater than man, it is still God's world.

To sum up, here is what seems to have been the aim pursued by the author of the book of Job—an aim kept in view through many a side turn and stated with more lyric than discursive means. He first showed, in a pitiless analysis of reality, the utter failure of the dogma, formerly established by Ezekiel, of the exact retribution of good and bad, in doing which he showed himself a realist of prime force. He set opposite a more or less scholastic theology, life, life with all its contradictions, life that baffles all dogmatic reasoning. Then, with a most impressive moral depth, he laid stress on the self-sufficiency and authority of moral conscience (the name of the thing may not be there, but the thing *is*). He

described, with admirable sincerity and in all its nakedness, the agony of a soul which truly searches for its God. Against a cold and authoritative proposition he refused to set up another thesis; all he opposed it with is just man's soul, wavering and changing, hoping and again losing all hope, cursing, rebelling, but rising in spite of all nearer to God. Both rebellious and submissive, despairing and confident, such is man. And his conscience is there too, on which he can and must entirely rely until his last day. Strengthened by the testimony of his conscience Job feels ready to stand the awe-inspiring sight of his Creator and magnificently proclaims his immovable assurance. He feels ready to undersign all the declarations of innocence he has made up to now: "Oh, that I had one to hear me! Lo, here is my signature, let the Almighty answer me: and that I had the indictment which mine adversary hath written! Surely I would carry it upon my shoulder; I would bind it unto me as a crown. I would declare unto him the number of my steps; as a prince would I go near unto him" (31: 35-37).

As we have seen, the poet considers the problem of suffering not only in an individual but also in a general way. He rises on one hand to the hope that at least in his personal case God will grant him—the suffering, righteous man—a last supreme voucher of divine justice, were it even on the edge of his tomb. On the other hand, he proclaims that suffering in general is beyond man's explaining, because God surpasses us too much in might and wisdom for us, poor mortals, to judge him according to our human measurement. So man—every man—



must just keep silent. The tragedy of things stays on, but the soul has risen above all passion; it is now set up on conscience as firmly as on a rock and commits itself to the hands of the almighty and immeasurably wise God, of the living and mysterious God.

In reading this poet one certainly rises above the ordinary level of Hebrew thought; a soul of towering genius is there revealed to us, a soul as little Jewish as can be. Its dramatic utterances are one long, mighty effort made to break with the traditional solutions of the problem of suffering and to clear a personal line of thought. Only the conception of the hymns of the Ebed-Jahweh can compete with the poem of Job in originality and depth, in religious and moral pith. But with Job the thought is more philosophical, the solution less individual and more systematic. Nowhere else in the Old Testament is the problem of suffering and of the divine ruling of the world tackled in such a universal way; and yet this masterly attempt got no farther than a few negative results; the cause of suffering has not been traced in that book. In this respect other conceptions, those of the hymns of the Ebed-Jahweh, for instance, and even such as did insist in olden times on the solidarity of successive generations, contain the elements of more positive truth. Yet the poem of Job will last for all time. As Renan beautifully said: "The blasphemy in it is little short of a hymn, or rather is in itself a hymn, for it is nothing but a cry to God against the failings that conscience finds in the work of God."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Renan, *Job*, p. lxii.

The voice of the great tragic bard raised no echo in Israel; the official theology offered a much easier way of turning the difficulty: you just have to throw everything back on sin, and when you speak about sin the least scrupulous often are the quickest in acknowledging it and talking of its sad reality. Only a few choice souls could free themselves of the tutorship of a solution which is as superficial as it is easy. Perhaps we must count among those the author of Ps. 88. This psalm is nothing else at bottom than a long cry of dark despair. A man tortured by sickness is struggling with death and throws up to God his dismal "why?" This psalmist, it is true, never recalls his sins and never chooses to see in them the wherefore of his torments. Nevertheless the author is so far from any solution that his prayer ends without one word of hope; neither the cause nor the aim of his evils is lit up by the faintest ray; it is just a mournful complaint interspersed with sobs.

But what best proves how unpopular the leading thought of the poem of Job was is the adding of the talks of Elihu to this poem. With those chapters (32-37)—in my opinion undeniably spurious—we again fall back to the level of more or less traditional ideas. The addresses of Elihu are an attempt to bring into the Book of Job a new thought—an interesting one, indeed, but one which stands in no relation whatever to the way in which the problem of suffering is understood in the rest of the book. The Book of Job only seeks for the wherefore, the efficient cause of suffering. The talks of Elihu also try to trace its aim and finality; suffering is the best way of schooling man; it

is the means that God uses to purify and sanctify us. "God," Elihu declares, "delivereth the afflicted by his affliction and openeth his ear in oppression" (36: 15). Suffering breaks up our pride, compels us to look into ourselves, and awakens us to salvation. This same idea is met with in other passages too; for instance; in Prov. 3: 12, where the wise man declares that "whom the Lord loveth he reproveth, even as a father the son in whom he delighteth." In a very suggestive disquisition Elihu declares to Job that God has at his disposal two different ways of warning men: dreams first, then pain (Job 33: 14 ff.):

He is chastened with pain upon his bed, and with continual strife in his bones: so that his life abhorreth bread and his soul dainty meat. His flesh is consumed away, that it cannot be seen, and his bones that were not seen stick out. Yea, his soul draweth near unto the pit and his life to the destroyers [33: 19-23].

Lo, all these things doth God work, twice, yea thrice, with a man, to bring back his soul from the pit [33: 29].

For the work of a man shall he render unto him, and cause every man to find according to his ways [34: 11].

And somewhere else:

He preserveth not the life of the wicked; he giveth to the afflicted their right. He withdraweth not his eyes from the righteous; and if they be bound in fetters, and be taken in cords of affliction, then he sheweth them their work, and their transgressions, that they have behaved themselves proudly. He openeth their ear to instruction, and commandeth that they return from iniquity. If they hearken and serve him, they shall spend their days in prosperity [36: 5 ff.].

The idea of suffering as a means of schooling man was of course likely to

reassure many hearts and spur them on to faithfulness.

However, as time went on, Palestine came more and more into contact with the neighboring countries and foreign civilizations. New seeds were thus sown on Palestinian soil and new paths were opened for Hebrew thought. And it is no doubt after having tasted at these new springs that one particular Jew, at a rather late period, dared to break off definitely with the traditional theology of his time. I mean that strange Qoheleth, the author of Ecclesiastes. What is peculiarly disconcerting among his many bold views is his absolute denial of all divine retribution. Qoheleth throws fearlessly and cold-bloodedly overboard that dogma of the Fathers: "There is a vanity which is done upon the earth, that there be righteous men, unto whom it happeneth according to the work of the wicked; again, there be wicked men to whom it happeneth according to the work of the righteous" (Eccles. 8: 14). And again: "All things come alike to all: there is one event to the righteous and to the wicked; to the good and to the clean and to the unclean, to him that sacrificeth and to him that sacrificeth not" (9: 2 ff.).

So Qoheleth sees the gaping abyss between theory and reality, but, while Job feels its existence in a deep, tragic mood, Qoheleth just records the thing in a cold, matter-of-fact way. He perceives no sanction; everything seems to him to go the wrong way, and suffering itself has no moral cause and cannot be rationally explained. But on the other hand Qoheleth believes in God. Renan expressed it pointedly: "You may find him a sceptic, a materialist, a fatalist,

and before all a pessimist, but one thing he most decidedly is *not*, and that is an atheist."<sup>1</sup> He believes that God is the sovereign ruler of the world; God gives us life, sets us our task here below, assigns to us wealth, good, and evil (7:14). And yet, as we have just seen, Qoheleth gives clearly to understand that no particular sanction distinguishes the good from the wicked (9:2 ff.). So we have the feeling that Qoheleth strikes against the conflict between faith and real life. The only way out that he finds is to proclaim that God's action and way of ruling the universe are beyond our understanding: "I beheld all the work of God, that man cannot find out the work that is done under the sun: because however much a man labour to seek it out, yet he shall not find it; yea, moreover, though a wise man think to know it, yet shall he not be able to find it" (8:17).

Thus we see that like Job he turns the difficulty by passing on human reason a sentence of powerlessness. Like all the other problems of life, the problem of suffering accordingly remains in his eyes an insoluble puzzle. But, contrary to the great lyrist Job, he does not allow his lips to shape as much as one word of downright blame to God. It must also be said that the God whose existence he continues to assert looks uncannily like the antique *Fatum*. Face to face with the Godhead, man has so well realized his humble condition that there is left in him neither distress nor rebellion. The problems of suffering and theodicy are no longer torturing him; a fair share of the philosophical mind enables him to become reconciled with the imperfection of all things. In so far he is more of a

Greek than a Jew, and so much impassiveness already points to a period of religious decline. What is to be done in this world of incoherence and misery? Let us gather the joys that pass within reach of our hands; let us enjoy, while there is still time, those short moments of pleasure, which are also perishable and delusive. When all is joy around us, we must give ourselves over to joy, but in thinking ahead of the evil days to come, "go thy way, eat thy bread with joy, and drink thy wine with a merry heart, for God hath already accepted thy works; let thy garments be always white, and let not thy head lack ointment. Live joyfully with the wife whom thou lovest all the days of the life of thy vanity" (9:7-9).

"Carpe diem," that is what seems to be the only practical solution of the problem of our life of suffering. Old age will soon come. Then, as our life-organs are wearing out with the passing years, our ability to enjoy gradually shrinks, then altogether disappears, and, according to the doleful description of Qoheleth, "thou shalt say: I don't take any pleasure." It is the time "when the almond trees blossom, and the grasshopper shall be a burden, and the caperberry shall fail: because man goeth to his long home, and the mourners go about the streets" (chap. 9, *passim*). On the whole, the horizon of the author remains limited by the old Israelitic belief that all is over with death, "and the dust return to the earth as it was, and the spirit return to God who made it" (12:7).

As was to be expected, the ideas of Qoheleth shocked his contemporaries;

<sup>1</sup> Renan, *L'Ecclésiaste*, p. 20.

and that is why they inserted into his book glosses which are meant to tone down to a certain extent his revolutionary thought, while supporting among other things the time-honored doctrine of retribution. "Fear God, and keep his commandments," the glosser says, "for this is the whole duty of man; for God shall bring every work into judgment, with every hidden thing, whether it be good or whether it be evil" (12: 13-14); and somewhere else: "Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth; but know thou that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment" (11:9). This is proof enough of the grasp that the dogma once established by Ezekiel still had on the minds of a large majority.

I mentioned before a few foreign influences which worked more or less directly on Qoheleth; they appear even elsewhere. So it is that Israel got from the Iran, after the exile, the belief in resurrection, which, spreading in wide, popular circles, gradually took the place, though rather late, of the ancient belief in the shadows of Sheol. The belief in a life after death cannot of course have failed to further in many ways the solution of the problem we are studying; that is what we notice in the Book of Daniel, i.e., in the time of the Maccabees (165-164 B.C.). Why does suffering exist? In order, Daniel answers, to try the faith and virtue of the true worshippers of Jahweh. Suffering staunchly borne, were it even to the degree of martyrdom, is a homage paid to God; the three young Jews in the furnace continue faithful to their religion and are thus instrumental in making the might and glory of their God shine resplendently before the eyes of the Gentiles.

Daniel himself is thrown into the lion's den, but God's majesty is made manifest by his deliverance, and the king is obliged to acknowledge the God of the Hebrews as the only living God. On the whole, for the author of Daniel, the problem of suffering can be summed up in these words of the Revelation: "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee the crown of life" (Rev. 2:10). And indeed for him the horizon of man is not that of this earth and of this life, for there is resurrection and life hereafter, in which all the problems left unanswered in this world receive a complete solution: "And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever" (Dan. 12:2, 3). Thus brought into relation to the Great Beyond, the problem of the suffering righteous lost some of its tragic sharpness, since whatever sanctions are not of this world come from the world beyond. The claims of theodicy were thus more or less fulfilled.

Among the many attitudes taken in the Old Testament with regard to the problem of suffering there is one which we must mention in concluding; though of a more practical than theoretical nature, it is nevertheless very deeply thought out, and perhaps it is here that the Old Testament reaches the high-water mark of lofty thinking and poetic perfection. I mean Ps. 73, that finely wrought jewel. Here also the question of theodicy is under discussion, that problem which comes up with the suffering

of the righteous and is often raised by the happiness of the wicked. It is the admirable confession of a soul which lays itself bare without hesitation, with all its distress and all its heart-rendings. The Psalmist scans the difficulty with perfect clearness; he shows it with complete frankness; nor does he forget the trouble this intricate problem has cost him: "And so I thought how I might know this, a trouble was it in mine eyes" (Ps. 73:16). But a moving transport of faith enables him to get over the formidable problem; he simply throws himself into the arms of God! He communes with his God in a flash of admirable and fervent mysticism. What is the earthly happiness of the wicked, what is the suffering of the righteous compared with the intimate communion of a soul with its God? *That* is real happiness, the only one that cannot be lost. To feel in one's self the presence of God, that is the greatest treasure of the righteous, a treasure that the wicked will never possess, a treasure of which the unrighteous will forever be deprived. This is the real punishment of the unrighteous; never will they taste of the ineffable sweetness of God's presence. That is, on the other hand, the real reward of the faithful: they always remain in the bosom of God. From this point of view all apparent injustice disappears; viewed from those towering heights of pure faith the sufferings of the righteous are but accidental, the happiness of the wicked is merely accessory, and this is the only supreme reality that stays: the mystic communion with God! And the righteous alone can enjoy this ineffable mystery. Neither suffering, nor death, nor all the miseries of life can

divert a faithful soul from its communion with God: "Nevertheless I am continually with thee: thou hast holden up my right hand, thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory. Whom have I in heaven but thee? And there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee. My flesh and my heart faileth: but God is the strength of my heart and my portion for ever" (Ps. 73:23 ff.). What else does this mean but that there is nothing more precious than to feel one's self quite near to God? And then, after the dark passage, will be the "glory," i.e., the life of the soul near God in that heaven where God will take up the faithful as he took up in olden times Enoch and Elijah. In other words, it is the glorious thought of immortality that inspires the Psalmist; there he will have his share of the ineffable raptures of those who are forever in the immediate presence of God; in him the ancient covenant proclaims like the new that whatever be the sufferings that fall to our lot, deserved or seemingly undeserved, "I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any creature shall be able to separate us from the love of God" (Rom. 8:38-39). This is in our opinion the highest pitch that a victim to suffering has ever risen to in Israel. It is no more, as in Job, the awful struggle of one fighting to prove his righteousness and find out the meaning of his evils; this idea does exist in Ps. 73, but the author goes even farther; the soul partakes of the divine mysteries of a mystic communion and rises to an immovable assurance of the faith that lifts up

mountains, even the mountains of pain. It is no more, as in Job, the struggle to grasp God; it is the full possession of God and supreme peace in this possession.

Israel has shown no metaphysical genius. Israel remained alien to philosophical thought. But what it does show us is how the men of the Old Testament were also tormented by the problem of suffering. Little by little, slowly but unswervingly, Israel became aware of the many aspects of the problem. Every one of the solutions contains a few seeds of truth, and step by step all those attempts culminate in a more and more original, more and more personal attitude. None of those thinkers riddled the puzzle, Job being the only one who

spanned it in its whole breadth. They were as a rule only stopped by the elemental obstacle of the righteous man's suffering. Though the Hebrew thought as such eventually had to recognize that it stood completely powerless before the tragic problem of suffering, yet Israel's faith did triumph over it by means more than once inconclusive (especially those of orthodoxy), but often also by bold intuitive flashes like those found in Isa., chap. 53, or in Ps. 73. These supplement each other just because they are contraries: sovereign efficiency of suffering when it is the self-willed sacrifice of the innocent for the guilty; nothingness of suffering compared with the blissful communion of a soul with the God it loves and of whom it is loved.

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## THE CHRISTIAN WORLD-ATMOSPHERE

### A SERMON

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I John 5:19: The whole world lieth in the evil one.

Acts 17:28: In Him we live and move and have our being.

One of the modern principles largely used in scientific study is phrased: Geography makes history. This principle is an attempt to state the truth that geographical location and climate have an important influence in determining human occupations, character,

social and political ideals, and even moral and religious outlook and character.

Excessive heat enervates and tends to produce irritability of temper and quickness of passion. Excessive cold produces inwardness of life, lack of sustained energy, lack of change, and little progress. Island isolation tends to develop narrowness of outlook, contracted sympathy, local feeling,